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# EAST TIMOR
## Refugees At Risk

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Amnesty International continues to be seriously concerned about the tens of thousands of East Timorese refugees in Indonesia. Pro-integration militias continue to be active in West Timor, including in camps where they have been responsible for "disappearances" and have prevented access to humanitarian aid. Elsewhere in Indonesia, East Timorese have been threatened and in some cases attacked. Their movements have been restricted through fear of such attacks and reports of checks at air and sea ports. This document updates Amnesty International's report issued on 24 September 1999: *East Timor, the Terror Continues* (AI Index: ASA 21/163/99)

According to some estimates there are over 200,000 refugees in West Timor alone. Their condition is said to be deteriorating as militia activity continues to prevent humanitarian organizations from delivering food, medical and other essential supplies to the camps. In the meantime, reports continue to be received from West Timor, Java, Sumatra, Bali, Flores and Sulawesi of human rights violations against the East Timorese refugees including unlawful killings, threats, harassment and intimidation.

Assurances were given on 30 September 1999 by the Head of the Indonesian Armed Forces, General Wiranto, to the United States Defence Secretary, William Cohen, that Indonesia would assist refugees to return to East Timor.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is expected to conclude a memorandum of understanding with the Indonesian authorities shortly, covering its role in relation to refugees. Further, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has announced that flights returning some refugees from West Timor to East Timor, under UNHCR auspices, will commence this week.

While Amnesty International welcomes all efforts towards ensuring that East Timorese are able to travel to a place of safety, the organization is concerned that refugees, particularly in West Timor, may not be in a position to freely exercise their choice to return to East Timor, to other locations in Indonesia or to third countries because of the level of militia control in the area. Already there are credible reports that pressure is being brought to bear on the refugees to remain in Indonesia by withholding food from those who have expressed a wish to return to East Timor. Further, despite the beginning of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in East

Timor, it is by no means clear that the conditions yet exist for safe return or the necessary infrastructure and services to meet basic needs.

On 5 October, the government announced that it had begun a selection process for those East Timorese refugees willing to be relocated within Indonesia, under a government transmigration scheme which would begin before the end of October 1999. A government official was quoted as saying that "...it is on a voluntary basis...We are not going to ask them whether they are pro-independence or pro-autonomy, but of course we shall ask them whether they want to sign up for the program or not". The government estimates that by the end of October 1999, 100,000 East Timorese - roughly half of the refugee population in West Timor - will have begun to be relocated. Amnesty International has received information from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in West Timor that a registration process for the transmigration program has already begun in refugee camps in Kupang, West Timor. The reports indicate that the refugees are being asked to state whether they wish to remain in Indonesia or return to East Timor.

Amnesty International is concerned that the conditions do not exist in West Timor for the East Timorese refugees to consent to relocation in Indonesia freely and securely and without intimidation. The organization is further concerned by reports from NGOs in West Timor that the manner in which the transmigration selection process is being carried out places East Timorese refugees in a position where they are forced to state, even implicitly, their support for integration or independence. With inadequate mechanisms to protect the refugees in the camps in West Timor, Amnesty International is seriously concerned that this exposes them to further risks of human rights violations.

In other parts of Indonesia, guarantees from the Indonesian authorities of safe passage for East Timorese refugees to ports of departure, whether to East Timor or a third country, remain lacking. An initiative to ensure the safe evacuation of East Timorese at risk in various parts of Indonesia appears to remain stalled.

Reports of abductions and threats in West Timor continue to be received. The whereabouts of six young men abducted by militias in Atambua on 27 September 1999 is still unknown. According to recent reports the six were taken outside a car workshop as they were repairing a car belonging to a priest. One of them is believed to be a taxi driver called Apio; another is a student but neither his name nor the names of the four others are known. Other reports of abductions of East Timorese in West Timor include the abduction of Bantalen Soares from the Stadium Gor refugee camp in Kupang by two members of the Aitarak militia during the week beginning 27 September 1999. Credible reports of refugees being recruited, possibly forcibly, into the militia also continue to be received. However, lack of access to human rights and humanitarian workers and the climate of fear in the area continue to hamper attempts to verify such information and to prevent domestic human rights organizations from reporting fully.

East Timorese attempting to flee East Timor and Indonesia continue to be at risk of human rights violations. Sources have reported eyewitness accounts of at least 38 unlawful killings of those fleeing East Timor on board passenger ferries after the 4 September announcement of the ballot, or as they have tried to move from island to island in search of safety. The killings are said to have been carried out by members of militia groups and by the

Indonesian police. Amnesty International has also received a number of reports of other such attacks on board ships which it has so far been unable to verify.

At least one person is known to have been prevented from leaving Indonesia in the last few days after their name appeared on an immigration list barring them from leaving the country under the order of Indonesia's military intelligence. Amnesty International fears that many activists, such as human rights defenders, humanitarian workers, students and National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) members, are likely to be on such lists and therefore may be similarly barred from leaving Indonesia independently.

In Flores members of the Indonesian military battalions 744 and 745, which have been redeployed from East Timor in recent weeks, are said by observers to be contributing to mounting levels of fear in the province. Although East Timorese refugees in Flores are not so far reported to have been specifically targeted, there are reports of local people being beaten and subjected to extortion, since the arrival of the battalions in Flores.

Amnesty International has received reports that members of Aitarak are in control of three camps in Ujung Pandang, Sulawesi, in which there are said to be over 3,600 East Timorese refugees. Although refugees are known to have been taken by boat from West Timor to Ujung Pandang, apparently for permanent resettlement, Amnesty International has so far been unable to confirm information about militia activity in the area.

Harassment of East Timorese, in particular activists, who live in or have fled to Jakarta also continues. Confirmed information from the last week includes reports of visits by the Indonesian police to a house in which East Timorese human rights defenders were living. Fearing for their safety the group moved to another safe house. In another case East Timorese staying in a hotel were forced to flee late one evening when members of the Indonesian military and militia members arrived at the hotel to look for them.

One prominent student leader, who has managed to leave Indonesia, has provided information about an attack on a dormitory in Jakarta between midnight and 2am on 16 September 1999. The 11 East Timorese staying in the dormitory fled or hid as militia members threw rocks at the house. The student leader also reported several cases in which members of his organization had been questioned, chased or attacked by militia members or the TNI. In one case TNI members are said to have visited a house in which East Timorese were living and demanded that they sign a document saying that they supported integration. Having been threatened that they would be killed if they did not sign, the refugees fled the house. In another case a student was approached at a bus stop by a group of men in civilian clothes who chased him after they discovered that he was from East Timor. According to the report the student managed to escape, but while being chased saw one of the men produce a samurai sword.

Amnesty International continues to seek to verify the many reports it is receiving of human rights violations against East Timorese refugees in Indonesia. In the meantime, it urges the international community to urgently address the question of how to assist and protect those who have been relocated, many of them forcibly, to Indonesia.

**Amnesty International's Recommendations**

The Indonesian government should:

- protect the East Timorese refugees in West Timor and other parts of Indonesia from threats and attacks by the militias, the Indonesian National Army (TNI) and the police;

- Disarm and disband the militias;

- Grant UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies full and unimpeded access to refugees in West Timor and ensure that these refugees are given adequate humanitarian assistance;

- ensure that refugees are able to exercise their rights, in accordance with international human rights standards, including their right to leave the country if they wish to do so.

- halt implementation of the Indonesian government transmigration project until it can be demonstrated that conditions exist for refugees to make their decision freely with effective monitoring by UNHCR and other independent agencies.

The international community should:

- put maximum pressure on the Indonesian government to fulfil the obligations above, including granting UNHCR and humanitarian agencies unrestricted access to refugees in West Timor and other parts of Indonesia;

- commit adequate financial resources to UNHCR and humanitarian operations for the assistance of refugees;

- make sure that any return program is accompanied by measures to ensure the security of refugees and the provision of shelter, basic services and humanitarian needs.

**KEYWORDS:** REFUGEES1 / CIVIL DEFENCE / FEAR FOR SAFETY / TRANSPORTATION

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